

From pony express to oversize load

Before the mid-1800s, package delivery systems were unorganised, both in the USA and in Europe, thus if people wanted to ship something, they had to contact a private courier who dropped off the package somewhere at destination, usually at a shop. Organised delivery began in the USA with the California Gold Rush in the 1860s, when large numbers of Americans began to settle in California, far from the main population centres. The immense distances separating the Pacific coast from the rest of the country made the old delivery system inadequate, leading to the first organised courier service being started by the Pony Express and Wells Fargo companies. They delivered messages, newspapers, mail, and small packages across America by horseback, tying the new state of California to the rest of America.



Over the centuries specialist couriers have developed quickly to offer a faster and more secure alternative to the usual mail service, but also to meet the increasing needs of online sellers and buyers.

Courier companies provide different services, so customers can choose among several options, depending on their budget and needs:

- **standard courier** services, which involve collecting, sorting and transferring the parcels to the closest depot before delivery to the desired destination in a few days;
- **overnight** services;
- **same-day** express;
- **international** courier service, beyond national boundaries.

The different **delivery service providers** are:

- **pony express**, which provides small/medium weight deliveries at short/medium distances by motorcycle, car or van, usually within 2,30 hours;
- **carriers**, which are large delivery companies (for example FedEx) that have a wide delivery network and a large fleet, including airplanes, trucks, vans, and ships;
- **freight forwarders**, which are subcontractors to airlines or carriers and offer specialised services like pallets, parcels, or bulky goods transport;
- **haulage services**, which transport bulky and oversize loads (or overweight loads) that exceed the standard or ordinary legal size and/or weight, such as construction machines, pre-built homes, containers or construction elements (bridge beams or industrial equipment). A vehicle which exceeds the legal dimensions usually requires a special permit and extra fees need to be paid to legally travel on the roadways. The permit

usually specifies a route a load must follow, as well as the dates and times during which it may travel, usually escorted by an escort car with special signs or by the police.





1 Find a word or an expression that corresponds to these definitions on the previous page.

1. It's a special authorisation.
2. It's the name used for short distance deliveries by motorcycle.
3. It's an individual or a company, as a railroad or steamship line, engaged in transporting passengers or goods for profit.
4. Transport of an overweight load is called in this way.
5. If delivery takes place within 24 hours it is known as this.
6. It is a large group of different means of transport operated by the same company.
7. The first couriers delivered mail or parcel riding horses.
8. Deliveries to other countries are called in this way.
9. A cargo of a size greater than average called in this way.
10. It was the large migration of people to the gold fields in the States.



2 Read the text and fill in with the missing words. There are three extra words.

Indians ■ epic ■ horses ■ citizens ■ pony express ■ novelists ■ service ■ stature ■ duty ■ saints ■ employee ■ distance ■ adventures ■ riders ■ fight ■ language ■ mail ■ employer ■ job ■ travel

Heroes on horseback

Soon after the start of the **1**., the fame of the young **2**., some only boys, began to spread throughout the country. They were considered a special class of **3**., because, although they were young and small in **4**., they did a hard and tiring job. As stories about them circulated, newspapers started to spread their **5**. and built them up to the level of **6**. heroes.

Much was expected of the riders, both in terms of their **7**. and in their personal life. In fact, riders were required to take the following oath: "I [name], do hereby swear, before the Great and Living God, that during my engagement, and while I am an **8**. of Russell, Majors & Waddell, I will, under no circumstances, use profane **9**. ; that I will drink no intoxicating liquors; that I will not quarrel or **10**. with any other employee of the firm, and that in every respect I will conduct myself honestly, be faithful to my duties, and so direct all my acts as to win the confidence of my **11**. So help me God." Those who seriously violated this oath could expect to lose their **12**. and the back pay. This is not to say that the Pony Express riders were **13**., but in most cases they were devoted to their task and proved their loyalty. Among the best known of the riders was William or Buffalo Bill Cody, whose adventures are among the most exciting in the story of the **14**. service: he rode a 22-hour ride in Wyoming from Red Butte Station to Pacific Springs and back, a **15**. of 480 km. There were also dramatic accounts of Cody's heroic escapes from **16**. and highwaymen, though some of his stories were the creations of **17**. and publicity agents.